

*Written by the Fish & Game in 1954*

Jessup Thomas, the son of a pioneer family, was born in Heber City, Wasatch County, on October 6, 1878. Young Thomas was left an orphan at the age of seven; but coming from a large family of eleven, there were older brothers and sisters to take care of him. Even though the caring hands of older brothers and sisters kept the fires of family life burning, life was not easy. The economy of this family, like the communities of the western frontier of that time, was not stable. Settlers were just beginning to dig in by building homes, breaking up farm lands, constructing irrigation systems and establishing the livestock industry, which later was to become an important part in the life of Jessup Thomas.

Young Jessup was only exposed to an education, for it was a long hike each day to the school house located four miles from his home. Early spring and late fall work took him out of school, as did very often the heavy snow of inclement winter days. So, for these reasons he received only an "inoculation" to schooling.

At the age of fourteen he was introduced to the work that he was to follow the rest of his life. He began to herd sheep. His first job, which was for George Coleman, took him into the area of Tooele. For two years he helped care for the Coleman flocks. Summer and winter ranges were not far apart in those days, the summer range being in the vicinity of Grantsville, where the lush desert grasses and shrubs furnished an abundance of food. The wintering grounds were not far distant.

After two years on the ranges with the Coleman flocks, young Jessup joined John Austin and for twelve years stayed with the sheep the larger part of the year. The sheep were summered in the area that is known as Current Creek in Wasatch County and on the West Fork of the Duchesne River and trailed to the wintering ground near Dugway and Keg Mountains in Western Utah. Sometimes they were wintered in the area east and south of Myton in Duchesne County. Thomas claims to have ridden all the ranges from the Green River west to Heber City and then into the desert ranges in the western part of the state.

When asked how he compared the forage on the ranges in the early days with that which we find today he said, "Well, I will tell you like I have told others. How does it look before and after you cut a hay field? Many times I snagged my horses on the branches of trees that had fallen under the thick growth. Often I had to take my pack horses and make trails through the heavy vegetation in Currant Creek before I could get my sheep to the destination. There are a lot of washes and gulleys there now that were not there when I first began to ride the

ranges. The reason of this, of course, is that the vegetative cover is gone."

When asked what he attributed the heavy use of the ranges to be, he said, "Well of course, we always did have too many sheep and too many cattle on the ranges, but also in the early days it seemed there were thousands of wild horses. Everywhere you went you would see big bands of them. The desert, as well as the mountain ranges, were covered with them. We even used to have trouble keeping our own livestock. There were stallions that had been beaten off by the leaders of other bands of wild horses, and they would come down to our herding grounds and steal our horses. One wild stallion owned by the Indians had to be killed because he coveted our band of horses and each night would come and round them up and drive them away. I have seen as many as twelve stallions in one band that had been driven out of the herds.

"Fifty-four years ago I pulled the first herd of sheep into what is known as Tabiona Flat. It was the most beautiful winter range I had ever looked at. White sage and grass grew as thick as it could grow and very high. That winter I had 3,800 head of sheep. Jim Clyde, Jim Murdock, Tom Crook, Tom Coleman and John Austin followed me into that area.

"I saw 16,000 head of cattle in Strawberry Valley. They were the property of Nutter, who ranged cattle all the way from this area to the Arizona strip. Among the 16,000 I remember there were 1,200 that were cut out that had big jaw.

"The streams were filled with trout, but I never caught any of them. Although I have been on the range all my life, I have never killed a deer. About the only thing I ever destroyed were coyotes.

"Governments regulations of the ranges have almost ruined the livestock men and will completely ruin them in the not too distant future. But I guess after looking back over the history of our ranges and what has happened, regulations had to come, and we will go broke anyway, whether we are allowed to use the ranges as we see fit or not.

"I have known every forest ranger coming to this district and found them all to be real gentlemen and easy to get along with. I remember the first time I met Ed Adair. He came to my camp about noon and wanted to count my sheep. I told him we couldn't count them all that time of day and would have to wait until morning when we would run them through a chute for him. Ed stayed all night. We had about 2,400 ewes and 3,000 rams in the flock. We started them through the chutes while Adair stood by counting them. Can you imagine counting 5,400 sheep? He counted and counted until what he was looking at looked just like a long string of white something passing before his eyes. He stepped back from the fence and said, 'Sheep, sheep, the G-- D-- sheep. How many does your permit call for? I told him and he said, 'well, that's just what you have.'"

This old timer, who is not as old as many we have talked to, has lived a hard rugged life. The dangers he encountered on the range were added to by some Indians and Mexicans who were hard to get along with. He related

that once while he was sitting on the side his flocks, a Mexican herder came by and his dog, jumped off his horse and began firing at him. He said he raised up and after using a few well chosen pleasantries, asked him why he was trying to shoot him. The Mexican replied, "Because I want to and I am going to shoot you too." With this he whirled around and aimed his gun at Thomas, who yelled back and said, "What are you going to do, shoot me and leave me up on this mountain without even a coat?" The Mexican jumped on his horse and was never seen in that part of the country again.

Old Timer related that on another occasion an Indian known as Willy Jack visited him at camp. "He was invited to dine, and when he left my best saddle horse disappeared. I went to the spot where I had him tethered and found the prints of Indian moccassins which strongly indicated that the Indian had ridden away with the horse. The next day I rode to his camp but no one was at the Indian Camp save an Indian maiden. She spoke English fluently and stated that the Indian had not stolen my horse. The fact that I had not mentioned the horse being stolen to the Indian maiden was conclusive evidence that the Indian buck had taken it. I tried for some time to get it back, but it was more than a year, and then with the help of a half-breed Indian named Ab Murdock, that I finally shot in the fields near what is now Tabiona.

Aside from what Jessup Thomas has contributed to the livestock industry, he has also endeared himself in the hearts of all who have known him. Besides raising two families of his own (he remarried after his first wife died leaving him a young family to raise), he also gave several other boys and girls the comforts of his home, afforded them with the necessary things of life, and helped them to receive educations.

It is said he has never turned an individual down who was in need, and it is known that he has loaned money to total strangers when they stated their real needs. Because of his kindness and the helping hand he has always extended, hundreds of western people love and admire him. No one could speak ill of this Old Timer.

Mr. Thomas is retired now, but the comforts of his little home in Tabiona are open wide to the passer-by, as was the latch string on the pioneer cabin and the flap of his herder's tent.

By Orson M. Allen  
2-2-70

To Whom It May Concern:

I, Orson M. Allen Declare this statement to be true in regards to the Bridger Jim Ditch, located to the west and slightly north of the townsite of Tabiona, Utah.

I came to the Tabiona area in 1911 along with my father. We stayed at the home of Arthur Maxwell. While we stayed with them for a few days we helped them put their second crop of hay up. This field was irrigated from the Bridger Jim Ditch. They told us at the time that this ditch was in existence at the time they homesteaded the place in 1905. The Indians that were there had plots of ground that they were irrigating from this ditch.